



HIGH-TECH JOBS HEAD INLAND

ECONOMY: A report shows an 8 percent increase in technical and scientific employment in the region.

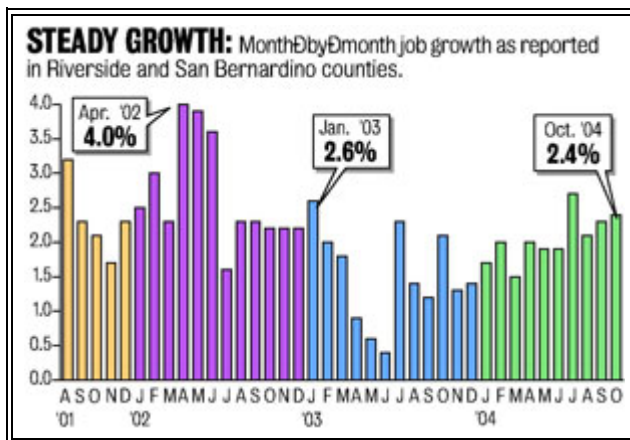
08:32 AM PST on Tuesday, November 16, 2004

By JACK KATZANEK / The Press-Enterprise

Inland Southern California is still the center of the state's employment growth, but now the region best known for its blue-collar muscle is gaining some science and technology jobs.

There were 26,400 more people on Inland payrolls last month than during the same month in 2003, an increase of 2.4 percent, according to a report released Monday by the state Employment Development Department.

Most of the new jobs provide services, from professional health care to retail sales. But the October report also indicates sharp growth in technical and scientific positions - the kind of jobs economists have been hoping would start sprouting here.



The technical and scientific service sector saw an 8 percent jump to 30,900 professional jobs, according to the state report. Inland economist John Husing said it's not surprising because the area's steady job growth opens the door for more technically trained support workers.

"We have a huge economy and we have to have technical people to service it," Husing said by phone.

"Remember, almost 50 percent of the homes built in Southern California in the last year were built here. That means more engineers, architects, surveyors."

Economists have been hoping to see more professional jobs in the region to help keep people from commuting.

"If you keep adding companies, eventually you're going to have to add CPAs and lawyers," Husing said.

Less Costly Housing

The region's job growth is due mostly to its growing population, as many people were drawn inland by housing that is cheaper than what can be found in neighboring counties.

But if job opportunities are increasing, Dave Hibbetts hasn't found one.

Hibbetts, 51, was laid off as a programmer of corporate mainframes for Honeywell International Inc. in Torrance when his job was outsourced to India.

Two years later, he said the market for his field remains flat.

"The ads I see are pretty specialized," said Hibbetts, who lives in Corona and has been working as a restaurant manager. "Because there are so many people looking, companies are being pretty picky."

Inland job growth easily outpaced that of other Southern California counties.

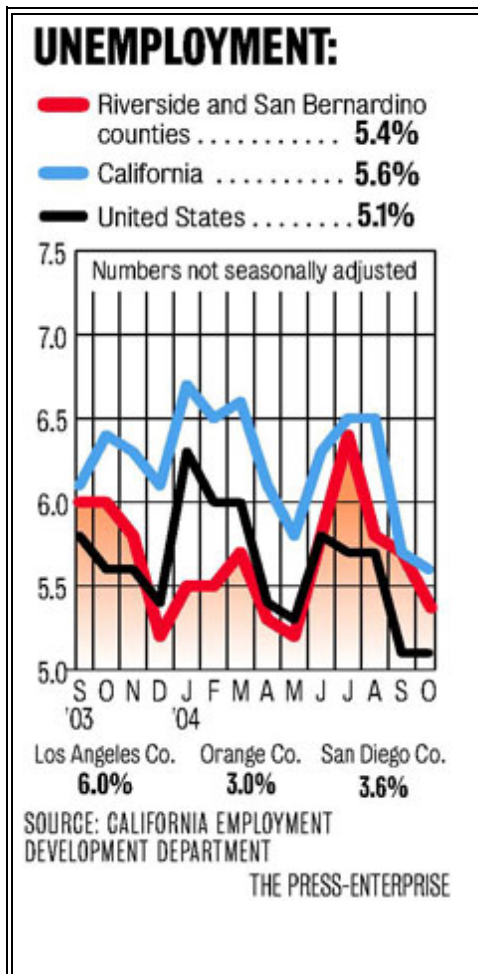
Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties all had year-over-year growth of less than 1 percent.

Los Angeles County, with more than 4 million people in its work force, did not see as many new jobs in the last year as Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

There are 1.8 million people in the Inland region's work force.

The Inland area saw healthy increases in the warehouse and transportation sectors, indicating that the flood of goods from the ports to the country's heartland is not letting up.

Thousands of job opportunities from the region's growing retail and hospitality segment continue to be created.



Blue-Collar Slowdown

But blue-collar workers who used to count on finding work on construction lots are now learning builders have all the help they need. Hiring has been flat for construction for the last few months.

And, there has been almost no net increase in factory jobs in the last year.

The fact that there are many more temporary workers, both factory and in other fields, than there were a year ago implies that employers are still worried about the cost of offering permanent jobs.

"That's for the usual reasons - the cost of doing business," Jack Kyser, chief economist for the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp., said by phone.

California remains an expensive place to operate a company due to high utility costs, workers' comp fees and other expenses, Kyser said in past interviews.

Unemployment declined to 5.4 percent in the Inland Empire in October from a revised 5.7 percent in September and is considerably lower than the 6.1 percent of a year ago.

The state reported 95,300 Inland workers on unemployment rolls.

Esmael Adibi, chief economist for Chapman University, said the lower unemployment could be because many people who have been out of work a long time no longer qualify for benefits.

This could include some of an estimated 500,000 Inland workers who are not on established companies' payrolls but reported some income, usually from self-employment or from very small operations.

'California Is Picking Up'

Adibi said California received what economists call a fair share of the national jobs gain. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported on Nov. 5 that 300,000 jobs were added in October. California expected to see about 12 percent of that, or some 36,000, but the state did better than anticipated.

"This month we got 43,500 jobs, so California is picking up," Adibi said by phone.

Reach Jack Katzanek at (951) 368-9553 or at jkatzanek@pe.com.

Online at:

http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE_News_Local_jobs16.a0f4a.html